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SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

11. Mideast

12. Iraq

Key stories in the media:

Under the banner "The Stick and The Carrot," Maariv led with a report that the U.S. administration has conveyed messages to the GOI, according to which a Palestinian state would be established, and President Bush would do everything to prevent Iran from achieving nuclear capability. The newspaper cited the GOI's expression of concern regarding the United States' determination vis-a-vis Iran, but its concern about developments as regards the Palestinians, especially in view of the high regard in which PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) is held by the U.S. Administration. Jerusalem Post reported that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is considering reviving the role Anthony Zinni played in 2001 as a security go-between to prod the PA and Israel into implementing the Tenet cease-fire plan. Jerusalem Post quoted diplomatic officials as saying that Secretary Rice's visit Sunday is an indication that the "U.S. is back in this in a big way," and that this will be manifest in a greatly enhanced security role for the U.S. Israel Radio reported that Monday, before her meeting with the team of senior Sharon aide Dov Weisglass, Secretary Rice stressed the importance of territorial continuity and a viable Palestinian state for the success of the diplomatic process.

Ha'aretz reported that Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz last night told Palestinian security official Muhammad Dahlan last night that there would be no transfer of West Bank cities to the PA without a total cessation of mortar fire into the settlements of Gush Katif. Israel Radio says that a new security meeting is slated for Sunday. The station cited the Palestinian newspaper Al-Quds as saying that Weisglass will meet with Dahlan and chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat on Thursday to prepare the Sharon-Abbas meeting. Israel Radio quoted a Palestinian official as saying that Israel has toughened its position and that it is demanding that even small groups, such as the PFLP, be disarmed. The media reported on nine launchings of mortar shells at Gaza Strip settlements on Monday, and on isolated bombing incidents in the West Bank. The media also reported that Hamas blamed the IDF for the death under still undetermined circumstances of a 10-year-old Palestinian girl in Rafah, and that the shelling was a response to that incident.

Leading media reported on, and Yediot led with, a threat by the Yesha Council of Jewish Settlements in the Territories that it would harden its anti-disengagement moves, including starting a hunger strike.

Leading media (banner in Ha'aretz) reported that Attorney General Menachem Mazuz informed the Association of Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) Monday that the cabinet's decision to apply the Absentee Property Law to East Jerusalem was made without Mazuz's knowledge or consent. Leading media reported that Mazuz will announce to the government today that he is acting to have the decision rescinded.

Maariv reported that a senior minister from a neighboring Arab country has recently approached his Israel counterpart -- a senior minister -- offering his country's mediation between Israel and Syria. The

proposal reportedly includes a "road map" comprising stages and agreement by both sides. Maariv says that PM Sharon rejects any diplomatic track with Syria. Yediot reported that during the weekend, three Israeli WMD control experts secretly met in Cairo with a senior adviser of President Bashar Assad and two Iranian academics.

Ha'aretz reported that Vice Premier Shimon Peres is promoting a proposal to pay a monthly allowance of USD 100 to every Palestinian living below the poverty line. The newspaper says that the idea came up during discussions between Peres and A/S William Burns, who visited Israel last week. The money is slated to come from the donor countries, which provide aid to the PA.

Ha'aretz quoted Deputy IDF Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Dan Halutz as saying before the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on Monday that the disengagement plan will cost the IDF 1.9 billion shekels (around USD 433.5 million). The newspaper also reported that the police have been recruiting hundreds of civilians over the past month who are slated to help with the evacuees of the Gush Katif (Katif Bloc) settlements.

Yediot, Maariv and Jerusalem Post reported that Shas party head, MK Eli Yishai, will visit Egypt next week and meet with Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman, as well as with other senior Egyptian officials, who will try to convince him to support the disengagement plan. Ha'aretz quoted MK Yuval Steinitz, chairman of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, as saying on Monday: "Egypt is the only country in the region that is preparing for the possibility of a military confrontation with Israel."

Jerusalem Post quoted Peace Now Spokesman Yariv Oppenheimer as saying that hoping to show that the "majority has decided," disengagement supporters are planning a big rally in Tel Aviv on February 19. Citing AP, Ha'aretz reported that the EU on Monday called on Israel and the PA to use a moment of relative good will to make a major move in the Mideast peace process by the end of February.

Ha'aretz reported that the police are trying to stop PA involvement in East Jerusalem's business sector.

Citing AP, Jerusalem Post reported that in Abu Dhabi on Monday, U/S John Bolton repeated U.S. allegations about an Iranian weapons program and said Israel might attack Iran's nuclear sites because it has a history of such actions. Jerusalem Post reported that Iranian news agencies and media have recently claimed that the Holocaust was a Zionist plot.

Ha'aretz reported that reportage in the U.S. media on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has declined slightly, and that during 2003 the National Public Radio (NPR) ombudsman received no fewer than 17,000 complaints about coverage of the conflict -- in 2004, that number dropped to a few thousand.

Ha'aretz reported that the German government is holding up the signing of a contract for the sale of Dingo armored cars to Israel for fear that the IDF will use them against the Palestinians.

All media reported that the government decided Monday that the last 20,000 Falash Mura [Ethiopian Jews who were converted to Christianity] who are eligible to immigrate to Israel will be brought here by the end of 2007.

Jerusalem Post reported that on Tuesday, exactly two years after Israeli astronaut Ilan Ramon and his six American colleagues met their deaths aboard the Columbia shuttle, Tel Aviv University Professor of Atmospheric Sciences Colin Price will present the findings of an Israeli dust experiment that Ramon conducted on the shuttle.

All media (banner in Globes) cited an announcement by Eastman Kodak on Monday that it would pay USD 980 million in cash for the Canadian-Israeli digital printing company Creo.

11. Mideast:

Summary:

Veteran liberal author Yoram Kaniuk wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Since the crisis in the [2000] Camp David talks, many people

realized that it was impossible to reach a peaceful solution. This is no longer true."

Yahad party head and Geneva Accord co-initiator Yossi Beilin wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "When we are the sovereign faction, we have no right to discriminate the minority with tools that we created when we were a persecuted people."

Senior columnist Haggai Huberman wrote on page one of nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe: " Israel must make it clear that there is no more 'tolerable' fire. No fire is tolerable."

Correspondent Yakov Shaus wrote in conservative Russian-language Vesty: "Sharon should be flexible -- on one hand he must show his willingness to negotiate with the Palestinians, and on the other hand he must insist that the U.S. require the disarming of Hamas and Islamic Jihad."

Block Quotes:

I. "Sharon and Abu Mazen Are Holding Hands"

Veteran liberal author Yoram Kaniuk wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (February 1): "Since the crisis in the [2000] Camp David talks, many people realized that it was impossible to reach a peaceful solution. This is no longer true. The Israeli Right grasped the century-old problem inherent in the conflict, but not the solutions. The Left understood the solutions but not the problem. Now, they are joining as Sharon and Abu Mazen are in unison.... Both old men have understood that both the Left and the Right have been wrong and that a new structure must be built so that our grandchildren can resolve the old structure's crooked ways.... On the fringes of the Left and the Right, people are always 100 percent right; therefore, they know no moment of doubt ... No attempt to see the other side ... or to think differently. They come with formulas, so they can dress them up."

II. "A State that is Jewish But Belongs to All Its Citizens"

Yahad party head and Geneva Accord co-initiator Yossi Beilin wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (February 1): "The decision of Attorney General Meni [Menachem] Mazuz to prevent discrimination in marketing Jewish National Fund land has made things easier for many of us, who do not want to see Zionism linked with such blatant damage to the equality of rights between Jewish and Arabs citizens of Israel.... What was just and appropriate when the Jews were a small minority in the Land of Israel [historical Palestine] and before the establishment of the state, is unacceptable after 57 years of independence. When we are the sovereign faction, we have no right to discriminate the minority with tools that we created when we were a persecuted people, with no legal possibility of immigrating to the Land of Israel and settling here. All we did then was to make ploys in order to survive."

III. "Israel Being Dragged Into Hizbullah-Style Fighting in Gaza Strip"

Senior columnist Haggai Huberman wrote on page one of nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe (February 1): "The Hamas organization sent a clear message in all directions on Monday, mainly to Sharon and to Abu Mazen: we are adopting Hizbullah's style of action in the last years of the IDF in Lebanon.... It decided that the ten year-old girl in Rafah was killed by IDF fire, and it decided on the pattern of response -- about ten mortar shells at Gush Katif.... Israeli restraint plays straight into the hands of Hamas policy. An Israeli response follows the game rules that Hamas planned: a response for the attack on a Palestinian civilian while maintaining a level of fire that is 'tolerable' and Israeli restraint. Israel must not be dragged into this cyclic pattern of action. Israel must make it clear that there is no more 'tolerable' fire. No fire is tolerable. The IDF's response does not have to be in the same place and in the same time. Freezing gestures for a long time, for example, or completely stopping any transfer of security responsibility over the Judea and Samaria [West Bank] cities (unlike the civilian responsibility that will remain in Palestinian hands) could also be a very fitting response."

IV. "Looking Forward to American Visitors"

Correspondent Yakov Shaus wrote in conservative Russian-

language Vesty (January 31): "The Israeli leaders forgave Arafat too much.... A new attempt to reach a compromise with the Palestinians must be accompanied by extremely tough demands of the PA. Prime Minister Sharon has said that Israel insists not only on a complete of eradication of terror, but also on ... putting an end to the anti-Israeli propaganda.... Incoming U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will visit Israel before the Sharon-Abu Mazen meeting. She is known to be much more intolerant towards terror than was her predecessor Colin Powell.... However, Washington is very interested in moving the peace process out of a deadlock. Sharon should be flexible -- on one hand he must show his willingness to negotiate with the Palestinians, and on the other hand he must insist that the U.S. require the disarming of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, which the U.S. has already included in its list of ... terrorist organizations".

12. Iraq:

Summary:

Foreign News Editor Arik Bachar wrote in popular, pluralist Ma'ariv: "What we saw on Monday in Iraq was the power of democracy. We saw people smiling broadly on the way to the ballot boxes."

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "Most Iraqis will ultimately be better off than they were under Saddam.... At the same time, the Bush administration will fall far short of its goals and the dream of a truly democratic Iraq. Like most events in the Middle East, the outcome will not be so clear-cut."

Block Quotes:

I. "Smiling On the Way to the Ballot Box"

Foreign News Editor Arik Bachar wrote in popular, pluralist Ma'ariv (February 1): "What we saw on Monday in Iraq was the power of democracy. We saw people smiling broadly on the way to the ballot boxes -- something that is reminiscent of the smile of a child whose parents allow him to cross a road for the first time without being escorted by an adult. The smile of a person who suddenly feels the joy and the distress of responsibility. I saw it a decade ago in South Africa, when the Blacks were allowed to vote for the first time in their lives.... The show of freedom, and the yearning to influence, which we saw this week in Iraq, must instill a bit of modesty into those who claim that there are human societies in the world for which freedom and democracy are less important than to us."

II. "Free For All, For Now"

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (February 1): "Iraq's election is one of the most important events in modern Middle East history and, as always happens with important events in the region, too much energy is being expended on partisan debates -- is U.S. policy succeeding or not? -- and too little on what is actually happening.... The result will most likely be a Shi'ite-dominated regime which will make a deal with the Kurds against the Sunnis. The rulers will have a vested interest in getting along with the U.S. (even while increasingly criticizing it); create a system more Islamic than that in Egypt or Jordan though far less so than Iran's; view both Iran and Syria as hostile, and be somewhat more democratic than Egypt and Jordan while far less so than the U.S. would hope.... Nevertheless, the more Iraq actually does gain self-government the less will a U.S. presence be able to cope with its issues.... Most Iraqis will ultimately be better off than they were under Saddam, while the insurgents are most certainly not going to win, and neither will the Iranians. At the same time, the Bush administration will fall far short of its goals and the dream of a truly democratic Iraq. Like most events in the Middle East, the outcome will not be so clear-cut. Problems do not yield way to clear solutions."